

2-3-1857

G.R. Vaden to Lou Farabee, 3 February 1857

G. R. Vaden

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Fellow Members;

In entering upon the duties of the honorable station, to which your kind partiality has assigned me, it becomes my duty, in accordance with the time honored custom of the Society of which we are members, to address you upon whatever subject may seem most appropriate. And I can conceive of none more so, than a brief consideration of the scenes through which we have passed: what is our relative position: and what we may fondly hope for in future.

By examining the history of our Society when in its infancy, and considering the disadvantages under which its founders were compelled to labor, as also, those who immediately succeeded, we have reason to congratulate ourselves that, we are here, under more favourable auspices — Instead of a room but poorly furnished, and a few odd volumes picked up, here and there; we have a magnificent Hall, and a Library containing upward of five thousand volumes, a reservoir from which the fountains of learning may flow, without diminution of value, and where the diligent seeker for truth and science may indulge to its fullest extent

his favourite passion— we stand now upon commanding ground— No longer dependent, for the increase of our Library, upon the few and far between contributions of its Members; but a sum is annually expended, and soon our shelves will be filled with valuable books, and we fondly hope, our minds be richly stored with useful knowledge.

But let us not deceive ourselves with the illusion that, all is well when our shelves are filled, and that there is no further need of exertion, and content ourselves, with going through all of the forms without realizing any of the benefits; but keep constantly before our minds, the Roman adage, "Quisque suae fortunae faber;"— The acquisition of knowledge is an enigma, and he who would work it out must exercise patience and perseverance—

We are here enjoying privileges and opportunities, for the want of which, many in our midst, have failed to erect for themselves, "*Monumentum aere perennius*"— The world is daily increasing in the discovery and application of those means of happiness, which the Creator of the Universe, has wisely bestowed for the benefit of his creatures; and how worse than folly would it be in us, not to avail ourselves of the opportunity, and refuse to stretch forth our hand, and pluck the precious fruit!

The great object of our being is to glorify him who made us. But can this be accomplished

by the cultivation and improvement of the physical man! By no means; it is true that a certain amount of attention must be had to the cultivation of the physical, but it sinks into utter insignificance, when compared with that which is necessary for the proper culture of the intellectual — It is by the cultivation and improvement of the mind then, the intellectual man, that we may hope ever to accomplish the great object of our being. I am free to admit that it is a difficult task, but *Ido difficilinus, hoc praeclarus*. The mind, as sparks are to fly upward, is prone to idleness, or rather, to seek refuge from labor, in speculations, air-castles and other wanderings of the imagination, but it can, and must be chained down, and that too, whilst it is young and yet tractable — We are here laying the foundation for the superstructure, which is to be reared in after life; and how diligent and careful should we be that, no materials enter therein, which may be, either the cause of its destruction, or undermine the edifice upon the security and stability of which may depend, our lives and our fortunes? I hope that I will be pardoned, if I indulge in a few remarks with regard to the most important branch of the Collegiate Course, which I regret to say is greatly neglected — It is admitted ^{by all the great men, who have ever written upon the subject} and contended, that, of all the sciences, Mathematics is best adapted to training and disciplining the mind, and the only one, competent to the task — It generates habits of close attention, systematic thought: and develops the resources of the mind.

With Mathematics, as our General, To arrange and discipline the forces of our minds, we go forth, To fight the battles of life, confident of success - If it be enquired upon what grounds of success are our expectations built? it may be answered, upon universal experience; it is a part of our being that, no labor shall go unrewarded - If we are but true to ourselves, we will have nothing to fear.

I take great pleasure, fellow members, in congratulating you, upon the spirit and zeal manifested in the discharge of duties in the Hall - I rejoice that North Carolina gave me birth; I rejoice that her University has been my "Alma Mater"; but most of all I rejoice to be numbered among the members of the Scholastic Society - It will ever be the pride and boast of my life that, my name shall appear in the Catalogue, under honorable, by those of a Polk, a Morehead, a Manly, and a Graham - And I look forward with eager hope and pleasing expectation to the time, when their places in the National Council shall be filled, by some, at least, of those with whom, it has been my good fortune to have associated - Permit me, fellow members, in conclusion, to return, to you my sincere thanks for the honor, which you have conferred upon me; and ~~not assured~~ ^{assured} that, I shall endeavour to discharge the duties of the office, to the best of my ability, and to the end that, we may "promote the love of virtue and science", I most earnestly desire your hearty cooperation.

March 7.th 1837

W. L. Gresham